
THE BOSTON TRADITION

AMERICAN PAINTINGS FROM
THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON



AN EXHIBITION ORGANIZED BY
THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON
AND THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF ARTS

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The first painters to come to America—the limners and heraldic painters, for the most part nameless, who painted the portraits of the inhabitants of the New World in the seventeenth century—worked in and around Boston, and from that time to the present the city has been a major center for the fine arts. Long celebrated for its eminence in America's political affairs, and as the home of such literary giants as Emerson, Hawthorne, and Henry James, Boston was also the birthplace of many of America's foremost painters, including John Singleton Copley, Winslow Homer and Childe Hassam, and of an artistic tradition that was cosmopolitan, romantic, and expressive more of the ideals of American life

cover

John Singleton Copley, *Mrs. Samuel Quincy (Hannah Hill)*, ca. 1761



than its realities. This exhibition celebrates that tradition, and the artists who forged it.

John Smibert ranks as America's first professional painter; he came to Boston from London in 1729, and painted the city's merchants and political leaders in a manner learned from high style portrait painters in England. A long line of portraitists, all schooled in the British tradition, followed him in Boston; their activity fostered such enthusiasm for art that prominent citizens competed with one another for the services of every painter who came to town. One of the most active patrons was Isaac Winslow, a Boston merchant who made his fortune through land speculation in Maine, and who commissioned portraits of himself and his family by Robert Feke, Joseph Blackburn, and John Singleton Copley. Copley, a tobacconist's son who had no formal training, rose to dominate the artistic scene in Boston in the 1760s and '70s. His patrons came from almost every walk of life: he painted brilliant political leaders such as John Hancock, wealthy landowners like Ezekiel Goldthwait, and genteel housewives like Mrs. Samuel Quincy. Despite his isolation in the colonies, Copley was intensely aware of artistic events in Europe (a devotion to European art which his successors in Boston would share); he painted Mrs. Quincy in the pose and costume of a portrait by Rubens which was the rage in England at the time, and this elaborate dress contrasts revealingly with her plain and sensitive New England features.



Washington Allston and Romantic Art in Boston

It was at the beginning of the nineteenth century that the pictorial arts in Boston embarked on a course distinct from the developments in the rest of the nation's artistic centers. In 1808, Washington Allston, a southern-born, Harvard-educated artist, returned to Boston from Rome, and introduced local art enthusiasts to the precepts of romantic painting then sweeping Europe. Unlike nearly every American painter before him, Allston did not earn his living as a portraitist, but rather specialized in subjects new to American audiences—contemplative young women representing a feminine ideal, idyllic landscapes set in a romantic past, and religious scenes. The aesthetic he championed, which was based on a preference for poetic rather than factual subject matter, an interest in color more than in line, and a strong orientation toward artistic events in Europe and toward the art of the old masters, would not only be popular in Boston during his own lifetime, but would shape the course of art in Boston to the end of the century.

French Painting in Boston: The Influence of William Morris Hunt

In the 1830s and '40s, Boston's art world was dominated by sculptors, artists who were trained in Rome and who developed historical themes with a moralizing message in marble rather than in oil. Boston's patrons during these years were enthusiastically commissioning works by those men and were collecting old master paintings—they especially admired Titian, Murillo, and Claude—which were being shown in Boston's art galleries, including the newly-formed Boston Athenaeum and the picture



gallery run by the popular portraitist Chester Harding. But at mid-century, the city's attention returned to painting, and the Boston tradition became decidedly francophile. With the guidance of William Morris Hunt, one of the first of many Boston artists to study with and later patronize the French painters Thomas Couture and Jean-François Millet, Boston's collectors began going to Paris to buy works from Millet, Courbet, Corot, and other Barbizon painters. At the same time, local painters, again led by Hunt, were emulating the Barbizon artists by working in a similarly warm-toned, freely brushed style and concentrating on intimate landscapes and peasant subjects. This trend contrasted markedly with artistic events in New York, where the preference for native art, and for the tightly painted, brightly colored panoramic landscapes of the Hudson River School was defining the artistic mainstream.

For the rest of the century, Boston would retain its interest in France, and in ideal, romantic subjects such as the delicate still-lives and evocative landscapes of John La Farge, a New York-born painter who gravitated to Boston in the 1860s and met great success there. In addition, Boston's cultural sophistication enabled it to attract such brilliant international figures as John Singer Sargent, whose numerous portraits of prominent Bostonians, and murals decorating the Public Library and several other city buildings attest to his popularity there. Winslow Homer, one of the greatest of American painters, was born in Boston, and always found the city especially receptive to his art. His series of Marine paintings done in the 1880s and '90s at Prout's Neck, Maine, seventy miles northeast of Boston, are far more than realistic descriptions of fishermen's lives; they are instead an eloquent representation of nature's power (a romantic theme which fascinated Boston's painters since Allston's time) and also of man's struggle in the face of the violence of that power.



Impressionism and the Boston School

Because of its long-standing interest in French art and its appreciation for color, Boston played a major role in the development of Impressionism in America at the end of the nineteenth century. The French painter Claude Monet had his first one-man show outside of Paris in Boston, in 1892, and prominent collectors there bought his work, and later Renoir's, Manet's, and Pissarro's, in great numbers. They also eagerly collected the works of Childe Hassam, Dennis Bunker, and Edmund Tarbell, all key figures in the American Impressionist movement and whose work was profoundly influential in the city.

In the twentieth century, the Boston tradition continued to develop independently of the nation's artistic mainstream. While the Armory Show (seen in New York, Chicago, and Boston in 1913) led many American artists, particularly those in New York, to experiment with abstraction, Boston painters like Frank Benson, Joseph DeCamp, and William Paxton developed a highly sophisticated academic style, derived from Impressionism but focusing on the human figure and presenting a serene, ideal, and timeless world. Through their association with the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, these artists transmitted their devotion to genteel subject matter and sound painting techniques to several generations of Boston painters. Their art maintains the high level of artistic achievement which for over 200 years has characterized the Boston tradition.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

JOHN SMIBERT (1688-1751)

1. *William Dudley*, 1729.
2. *Mrs. William Dudley (Elizabeth Davenport)*, 1729.
3. *Daniel, Peter, and Andrew Oliver*, 1732.

ROBERT FEKE (active before 1741-after 1750)

4. *Isaac Winslow*, ca. 1748.

JOHN GREENWOOD (1727-1792)

5. *Mrs. Henry Bromfield (Margaret Fayerweather)*, 1749-1750.

JOSEPH BADGER (1708-1765)

6. *Mrs. John Edwards (Abigail Fowle)*, ca. 1750-1760.

JOSEPH BLACKBURN (active 1752-1774)

7. *Isaac Winslow and His Family*, 1755.
8. *Susan Apthorp (Mrs. Thomas Bulfinch)*, 1757.

JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY (1738-1815)

9. *Mrs. Samuel Quincy (Hannah Hill)*, ca. 1761.
10. *Ezekiel Goldthwait*, 1771.
11. *Mrs. Ezekiel Goldthwait (Elizabeth Lewis)*, 1771.
12. *The Copley Family*, ca. 1777-1789.

MATHER BROWN (1761-1831)

13. *Admiral Peter Rainier*, ca. 1786-1787.

JOHN JOHNSTON (ca. 1753-1818)

14. *Man in a Gray Coat*, ca. 1788.

CHRISTIAN GULLAGHER (1759-1826)

15. *Major Benjamin Shaw*, ca. 1789. Anonymous loan.
16. *Mehitable Shaw*, ca. 1789. Anonymous loan.

GILBERT STUART (1755-1828)

17. *Colonel James Swan*, 1795.
18. *Mrs. Thomas Dennie (Sarah Bryant)*, 1818.
19. *Bishop Jean-Louis Lefebvre de Cheverus*, 1823.

WASHINGTON ALLSTON (1779-1843)

20. *Self-Portrait*, 1805.
21. *Beatrice*, 1819.
22. *Moonlit Landscape*, 1819.

ROBERT PECKHAM (1785-1877)

23. *The Peckham-Sawyer Family*, ca. 1817.

HENRY SARGENT (1770-1845)

24. *The Dinner Party*, ca. 1820-1821.

ALVAN FISHER (1792-1863)

25. *Sugar Loaf Mountain*, 1821.

JOHN NEAGLE (1796-1860)

26. *Gilbert Stuart*, 1825.

THOMAS DOUGHTY (1793-1856)

27. *New Hampshire Lake*, ca. 1832.

JEREMIAH PEARSON HARDY (1800-1887)

28. *Catherine Wheeler Hardy and her Daughter*, ca. 1842.

FRANCIS ALEXANDER (1800-1880)

29. *Charles Dickens*, 1842.

WILLIAM MATTHEW PRIOR (1806-1873)

30. *William Allen*, 1843.

GEORGE LORING BROWN (1814-1889)

31. *Castello dell'Ovo, Bay of Naples*, 1844.



CHESTER HARDING (1792-1866)

32. *Mrs. Abbott Lawrence*, ca. 1855.

WILLIAM SHARP (1803-1875)

33. *Fruit and Flower Piece*, 1848.

FITZ HUGH LANE (1804-1865)

34. *Ships in Ice Off Ten-Pound Island, Gloucester*, 1850s.

35. *Fresh Water Cove from Dolliver's Neck, Gloucester*, early 1850s.

36. *Boston Harbor*, ca. 1858.

BENJAMIN CHAMPNEY (1817-1907)

37. *Mount Chocorua, New Hampshire*, 1858.

AMERICAN SCHOOL

38. *Meditation by the Sea*, ca. 1860-1865.

MARTIN JOHNSON HEADE (1819-1904)

39. *Approaching Storm: Beach Near Newport*, ca. 1860.

40. *Salt Marshes*, ca. 1865-1870.

WILLIAM MORRIS HUNT (1824-1879)

41. *The Fortune Teller*, 1852.

42. *Mrs. Robert C. Winthrop, Jr. (Frances Pickering Adams)*, 1861.

43. *Self-Portrait*, 1866.

GEORGE PETER ALEXANDER HEALY (1813-1894)

44. *Orestes Brownson*, 1863.

WILLIAM P. BABCOCK (1826-1899)

45. *Girl with a Pink Bonnet*, 1865.

JOSEPH FOXCROFT COLE (1837-1892)

46. *Valley of the Rambouillet*, ca. 1865-1870.

THOMAS R. ROBINSON (1835-1888)

47. *Woods and Equestrienne*, ca. 1870.

WINCKWORTH ALLAN GAY (1821-1910)

48. *Landscape (Farmhouse at Rye Beach, New Hampshire)*, 1870.

ELIHU VEDDER (1836-1923)

49. *The Questioner of the Sphinx*, 1863.

JOHN LA FARGE (1835-1910)

50. *Halt of the Wise Men*, ca. 1868.

WILLIAM RIMMER (1816-1879)

51. *Flight and Pursuit*, 1872.



GEORGE INNESS (1825-1894)

52. *Lake Nemi*, 1872.

53. *Kearsarge Village*, 1875.

FRANK DUVERNECK (1848-1919)

54. *The Old Professor*, 1871.

GEORGE FULLER (1822-1884)

55. *The Dandelion Girl (By the Wayside)*, 1877.

HENRY BACON (1837-1912)

56. *On Shipboard*, 1877.

WINSLOW HOMER (1836-1910)

57. *Boys in a Pasture*, 1874.

58. *The Fog Warning*, 1885.

FREDERIC PORTER VINTON (1846-1911)

59. *Samuel H. Russell*, 1880.

FREDERICK CHILDE HASSAM (1859-1935)

60. *Grand Prix Day*, 1887.

61. *Charles River and Beacon Hill*, ca. 1890-1892.

JOHN SINGER SARGENT (1856-1925)

62. *Oyster Gatherers of Cancale*, ca. 1878.

63. *Mrs. Fiske Warren and her Daughter Rachel*, 1903.

64. *An Artist in his Studio*, ca. 1904.

DENNIS MILLER BUNKER (1861-1890)

65. *The Pool, Medfield*, 1889.

66. *Jessica*, 1890.

JOHN J. ENNEKING (1838-1916)

67. *The Rundy House on the Neponset River*, 1890.

JOHN APPLETON BROWN (1844-1902)

68. *Early Summer*, ca. 1890.



MAURICE BRAZIL PRENDERGAST (1859-1924)

69. *Race Track*, ca. 1900.

70. *Woman in a Brown Coat*, 1908.

EDMUND CHARLES TARBELL (1862-1938)

71. *Edward Robinson*, 1906.

72. *Reverie (Katherine Finn)*, 1913.

FRANK WESTON BENSON (1862-1951)

73. *Eleanor*, 1907.

74. *The Silver Screen*, 1921.

JOSEPH RODEFER DECAMP (1858-1923)

75. *The Blue Cup*, 1909.

THEODORE WENDEL (1859-1932)

76. *Bridge at Ipswich*, ca. 1908.

LILIAN WESTCOTT HALE (1881-1963)

77. *L'Edition de Luxe*, 1910.

WILLIAM MCGREGOR PAXTON 1869-1941)

78. *The New Necklace*, 1910.

All works, oil on canvas

Publication

THE BOSTON TRADITION

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Poster

John Singer Sargent, *Mrs. Fiske Warren and her Daughter Rachel*, 1903

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